



The Trail Foundation

Strategic Plan

Adopted May 2020

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It is a great equalizer, forever free and welcoming.
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It is a natural setting where healing, hope, joy, connection, and love are at home.
Each and every year, the Trail has become a more appealing and inviting place.
Each and every year, more users at every stage of life enjoy its many pleasures.
For many, the communion with nature is the highlight of their day.
This is the people’s Trail.*

Note: The period during which this plan was developed, from January to May 2020, was one of exceptional vitality and optimism followed by unprecedented disruption of communities and economies globally, nationally, and locally wrought by the novel coronavirus. The speed and nature of the impending recovery — and its impact on this plan—are yet unknown.

This plan was written to last beyond today and tomorrow, well into the future. While we cannot know what Austin’s future holds in the near term, we cannot imagine Austin without the Trail. And, a plan to continually improve it. It is our inheritance and our legacy.



Background

The 10-mile long Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail, along with Lady Bird Lake that it surrounds, is located in the center of Austin, Texas, which is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. In a city of more than one million, known for its active outdoor life, the popular and heavily used trail has more than four million visits a year. The Trail and lake are considered by many to be the Austin's most beloved and restorative natural amenities — sources of beauty, pride, history, and health. They are iconic treasures that define Austin's quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

The Butler Trail was established in the 1970s. Since then, the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department (CoA PARD) has exercised responsibility for operating and maintaining the Trail. In 2003, The Trail Foundation (TTF), a 501(c)(3) was formed to enhance the Trail. Since that time, TTF has invested more than \$13 million in various improvements to this public asset, most notably the Boardwalk on the south side of the lake. In 2018, TTF announced plans for 15 additional projects, ranging from restrooms at Festival Beach to the redevelopment at Drake Bridge. In 2019, TTF entered into discussions with the City's PARD and Watershed Protection Department (WPD) about expanding its role beyond project development to encompass some aspects of maintenance and operations and activation. Toward that end, in 2019 TTF engaged both the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and ETM Associates to consider its vast potential for the future.

In early 2020, TTF committed to the development of this three to four-year Strategic Plan. The plan incorporates input from various consultants, TTF's board and staff, and representatives of the City of Austin. Upon approval, TTF will develop a Management Plan to implement the priorities articulated herein. This effort was guided by M. Crane & Associates, Inc.

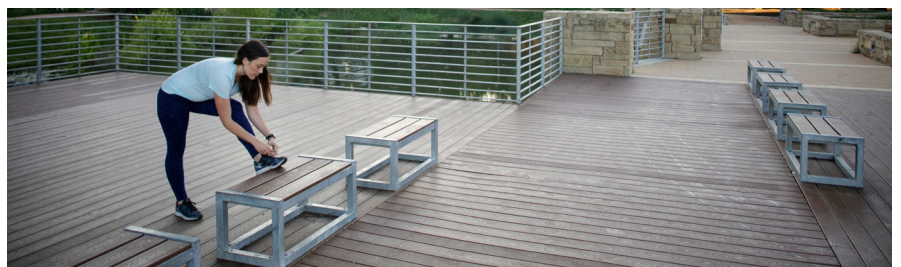
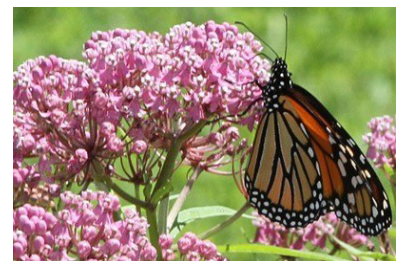
Vision, Mission, & Core Values

Vision for the Trail (a look toward 2030 and beyond)

The beloved Butler Trail is a natural sanctuary that hugs the shores of Lady Bird Lake in the heart of downtown Austin.

It's a healing place, a place where people go to clear their minds, commune with nature, gather for fun, or stretch their boundaries. It's miles of well-loved places—a place to splash in the lake, push a stroller, spot a heron, hear live music, grab a beer, catch up with friends, ride a bike, run for miles, or just be. It's a place to experience Austin in all its diversity at every stage of our lives. And it's the center of the city's expanding network of connected urban paths. Ultimately, the Trail will extend further eastward and westward along the lake.

It's easy for everyone in Austin to get to. It connects people to nature and us to one another for generations to come.



Our Mission

The Trail Foundation's mission is to protect, enhance, and connect the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail at Lady Bird Lake for the benefit of all.

Our Core Values

Community

Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion for all.

Excellence

Dream big, set a bold vision and achieve transformative results.

Collaboration

Cultivate strong partnerships to amplify our efforts.

Stewardship

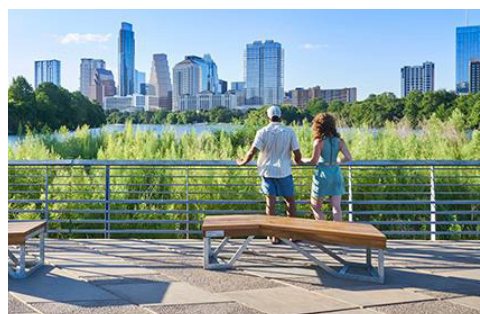
Honor the legacy of the Trail and ensure its vitality for generations to come.

Environment

Preserve and protect the urban natural setting and our experience in it.

Well-being

Stay safe, be healthy, have fun.



2020 - 2023 Strategic Priorities



Core Priorities

1. Enhance the Trail to the Highest Standard Ever

Preserve and restore the natural environment, and continue expansion of creative place-making

2. Engage the Community More Fully

Develop and implement an expansive plan of community engagement making the Trail a welcoming and engaging place for all

Enabling Priorities

3. Develop Effective Strategic Partnerships

Develop effective and enduring relationships, particularly with the City of Austin

4. Expand Funding from All Sources

Develop and implement a robust fundraising strategy that leverages public and private resources

5. Enhance TTF's Brand Image

Develop and lead the implementation of two-way communication strategies that reposition The Trail Foundation for the successful accomplishment of all priorities

Foundational Priority

6. Grow Organizational Capacity

Expand resources essential to accomplishing these priorities



Enhance the Trail to the Highest Standard Ever

Preserve and restore the natural environment and continue the expansion of creative place-making

Maintaining and enhancing the natural environment is an imperative; the quality of the natural environment is the primary motivation for people to visit the Trail. TTF is in discussions with the City of Austin to gradually transfer responsibility for certain maintenance and operations from the CoA to TTF. TTF's objective in transferring these roles is not to replace, but to supplement CoA's maintenance, thus improving the natural environment and users' experiences even as Austin's urban core grows, reliance on active transportation expands, and trail usage increases.

In addition, TTF has already committed to completing more than ten new projects in the next four years. Beyond that, foreseeable development along Lady Bird Lake will likely create new opportunities to support active transportation and placemaking (that will facilitate community gatherings and engagement) that TTF intends to seize and optimize.

This priority reflects sustained and expanded commitment to ecological restoration/conservation, project completion, and placemaking. (Trail extension — to the east or west — is not anticipated during this period, though related planning efforts may occur.)



Engage the Community More Fully

Develop and implement an expansive plan of community engagement, making the Trail a welcoming and engaging place for all

The Trail will always be public parkland and will always belong to the people. To serve our city in all its diversity and strengthen our social fabric, the Trail must be a welcoming and engaging place for all. TTF, therefore, will improve, maintain and operate the Trail such that it will provide enhanced and more inclusive user experiences. Design and engagement will employ best practices that promote active transportation, placemaking and community well-being. TTF will develop and implement community programming that serves everyone, especially attuned to those who have been historically underserved. Programming will be multifaceted — educational (in terms of arts, culture, history, the environment, health and well-being), health-oriented, and fun to enhance people's health and the overall quality of life of people throughout the community. Trail utilization will be measured, monitored and managed to achieve the dual goals of high levels of utilization and quality users' experiences.

Develop Strategic Partnerships

Develop effective and enduring relationships, particularly in partnership with the City of Austin

Cities around the country are increasingly discovering that their aspirations for parks and public spaces exceed their financial capacity. As a result, Public Private non-profit Partnerships (PPPs) are forming to enhance the quality of public spaces and parkland. Heretofore, TTF has had a project-based approach to land management. Going forward that will be augmented by expanding ecological restoration and implementing a more comprehensive approach toward enhanced user experiences. The Trail Foundation's demonstrated commitment to trail enhancements, its responsible stewardship, and its capacity to attract philanthropic dollars combine to make it an ideal partner for the CoA's PARD and WPD. TTF seeks a trusted partnership with the CoA that is based on a shared vision for the Trail, the leveraged strength of each partner, clear roles and responsibilities, effective communications, and shared dedication to serving the public.

In addition to the anticipated formal partnership agreement with the City, TTF will collaborate with numerous other entities to expand the value of the Trail. New or evolving partnerships may include but will not be limited to: various City departments, the Downtown Austin Alliance, nearby property owners, other conservancies, neighborhood groups, schools and other youth serving organizations, ecological and cultural entities, health entities, mobility planners, and vendors, consultants, and service providers. As Austin's downtown continues to grow, TTF will seek collaborations with adjacent property owners to encourage their financial support and to create easements that enhance public access to the Trail.

Expand Funding from All Sources

Develop and implement a robust fundraising strategy that leverages public and private resources

There are many foreseeable expenses. Some are likely to scale only modestly, such as continued projects/placemaking, ecological restoration. Others will grow substantially, such as expanded operations and maintenance; expanded programming and community engagement, expanded communications, and expanded fundraising. Three sources of funding will be required to meet these growing expenses: 1) new sources of revenue/earned income, 2) philanthropic sources, and 3) public funding. To grow these sources of funding, TTF will act strategically and opportunistically to expand financial resources inclusive of expanding its development capacity and enhancing its brand (see Strategic Priority #5 below).

Note that in Q2 of 2020, it is particularly difficult to establish expectations for the short and mid-term future.



Enhance TTF's Brand Image

Develop and lead the implementation of two-way communication strategies that reposition The Trail Foundation for the successful accomplishment of all priorities

Enhanced brand recognition and loyalty will be needed to support expanded community programming and engagement, increased usage by diverse communities, and growing funding goals. A successful strategy will require two-way communication that includes listening to users and potential users, promoting TTF, and community outreach centered around people's needs and wishes.

Grow Organizational Capacity

Expand TTF's capacity and resources essential to accomplishing these priorities

In the best of times, an enhanced trail with more appealing amenities and places, as well as more users, more diverse users, and more satisfied users, would require enhanced organizational capabilities commensurate with the transition to a conservancy model. At this juncture, managing change in a period of uncertainty will be particularly demanding, especially as this transition has implications for staffing, governance, facilities, and other resources. TTF is committed to adaptive growth and a culture that is outcome driven, routinely measuring and demonstrating success.

As TTF grows to accomplish its expanded responsibilities, it will also increase the diversity of its staff and board.



Looking to the Future

At a time of unprecedented economic turbulence, it is fair to ask: Are these strategic priorities too ambitious? Do they reach too far?

We can find the answers in the vision and dogged energy that Lady Bird Johnson, Roberta Crenshaw, Ann and Roy Butler, and dozens of others brought to create the Trail. They saw the potential and shepherded their dream for years, bringing their trowels, shovels, and seedlings to the task of creating a Trail for all of Austin for generations to come.

Fifty years later, our challenge is to carry their work forward. We are our generation's stewards of this extraordinary place that has already touched the lives of so many people. These strategic priorities are our North Star.

Some might question whether we should outline such an ambitious plan at a time of economic uncertainty. But we see it differently. We are digging deeply within ourselves for that wellspring of hope and energy that characterized the early visionaries and gardeners who brought the Trail to life. And we intend to spread that passion widely throughout the community.

The work of the Trail has never been more important. It is a touchstone for the community in all its diversity. It is a great equalizer, forever free and welcoming. It requires nothing of the people who come to visit in the millions. It is a natural setting where healing, hope, merriment, joy, connection, and love are at home. Each and every year, the Trail has become a more appealing and inviting place. Each and every year, more users at every stage of life enjoy its many pleasures. For many, the communion with nature is the highlight of their day.

We also recognize that the Trail is not yet all that it can be or will be. Yes, the next three or four years may be characterized by slower progress than many would like. Yes, there may well be a more challenging fundraising environment than hoped. But the future of the Trail matters as much as ever, maybe more. It supports our community's mental and physical health, recreation, mobility, humanity, generosity, equity, and sense of connection. That is why we are resolved to move forward to enhance the Trail experience for all with a bold plan for the people's Trail.

Still coming... a thorough, disciplined management plan that corresponds with the strategic priorities. For the Trail and for Austin, the best is yet to come.



**The Trail
Foundation**

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